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MASTERPIECES
OF
MATHURA SCULPTURE

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MASTERPIECES OF MATHURĀ SCULPTURE

Mathurā on the Yamunā is famous as the birthplace of Kṛishṇa. It was the seat of the Bhāgavata religion from about second century B. C. to fifth century A. D. It also became a flourishing centre of the Jaina and the Buddhist religions. The religious zeal of these three communities found its concrete expression in the creation of a great school of art which for its vitality and assimilative character has seldom been surpassed.

The earliest stone sculptures of Mathurā available in the form of the colossal Yaksha images may be dated in the fourth-third century B. C. as examples of an archaic folk-art which existed side by side with the court art.

The most famous of these is the huge image from Parkham village. Yaksha worship was a wide-spread ancient cult and gigantic images, both male and female, were installed in honour of these divinities. The Parkham Yaksha gives firm proof of the early use of stone for plastic art and its iconographic formula sets it forth as the grand ancestor of subsequent Indian statuary. The free-standing pose carved in the round, colossal size, attitude of the two hands, the right one near the shoulder and the left akimbo, the drapery as an upper scarf and dhotī, the ornaments as torque, triangular necklace, armlets, bangles, bold and gracious expression, majestic stance and impressive volume have been skilfully integrated in a frontal frame which mark the Parkham Yaksha as an exemplar in the whole range of historic Indian art. As hinted by the surviving epigraph, it represented the Yaksha king Māṇibhadra whose worship was very popular amongst merchants and householders.

Then follow in the Śuṅga–Kaṇva (c. 200–1 B. C.), Kushāṇa (c. 1 A. D. –300 A. D.) and Gupta periods, numerous creations of statuary

and architectural monuments which constitute a valuable record of Indian religious art history. Mathurā *ateliers* were most active during the epoch of the great Kushāṇa emperors, Kanishka, Huvishka and Vāsudeva, whose reign represents the Golden Age of Mathurā sculpture.

During these several centuries the master-artists of Mathurā succeeded in achieving magnificent results. They created not only a quantum of independent and varied statuary, but also built at least six big Stūpas, two for Jainas on the sites of Kaṅkālī Ṭīlā, and four for Buddhists, at the sites of Jamālpur (*Huvishka Vihāra*), Bhūteshvar, Kaṭrā Keśavadeva (*Yaśā Vihāra*), and on the banks of the Yamunā (*Guhā Vihāra*). The first, as known from inscriptions, was raised in the time of Huvishka. Brāhmanical shrines at Mathurā began to be built quite early as shown by the discovery of an epigraph, viz. the Morā Well-Inscription as well as other records like the lintel of the time of Śoḍāsa. It was in the reign of Chandragupta Vikramāditya that a magnificent temple of Vishṇu was built at the site of Kaṭrā Keśavadeva. The monumental Stūpas of the Jainas and the Buddhists were furnished with carved railings and gateways of which numerous examples have been found during excavations at the Stūpa sites and as stray sculptures. Architecture and sculpture flourished together. Beautiful sculpture, carved in the round and in relief, images of gods and goddesses as well as secular statues constitute vivid record of the ancient lithic art of Mathurā. Images of Yakshas and Yakshīs, Nāgas and Nāgīs, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, Tīrthaṅkaras both seated and standing, Kubera and Bacchanalian groups, Śivaliṅga and anthropomorphic Śiva, Vishṇu, Sūrya, and Kārttikeya, Saptamātṛikās, Mahishāsuramardinī, Śrī-Lakshmī, Sarasvatī, Āryāvatī, Durgā, etc. constitute an exceptionally rich pantheon which stands to the credit of Mathurā School.

Mathurā sculpture is distinguished by several qualitative features of art, culture and religious history. The geographical position of the

city on the highway leading from the Madhyadeśa towards Madra-Gandhāra contributed in a large measure to the eclectic nature of its culture. Mathurā became the meeting ground of the traditions of the early Indian art of Bharhut and Sānchī together with strong influences of the Iranian and the Indo-Bactrian or the Gandhāra art from the North-West. The Persepolitan capitals with human-headed animal figures and volutes as well as the presence of the battlement motif as a decorative element point to Iranian affinities. These influences came partly as a result of the general saturation of foreign motifs in early Indian sculpture as found in the Stūpas of Bharhut and Sānchī also.

The second strong element of Mathurā art is the free use of the Hellenistic motifs and themes; e.g. the honey-suckle, acanthus, Bacchanalian scenes conceived round an Indianised pot-bellied Kubera, garland-bearing Erotes, Tritons, Heracles and the Nemean Lion, the Eagle of Zeus and the Rape of Ganymede, were strictly classical subjects but rendered in Mathurā art with admirable insight and freedom.

The third feature of the Mathurā school is the fusion of the old Indian folk-cults as the worship of the Yakshas, Nāgas with the new forms of worship introduced by the Buddhists, the Jainas and the Hindus. Here one finds an unrestricted assemblage of both the early and the later norms of religious worship. In place of conflict between the claims of several traditions, we meet with the broad synthesis and warm-hearted sympathy prevailing amongst the different sections of votaries, whose gods flourished by the mutual concord of their followers. The beneficial outcome of this spirit is evident most in the common forms of art which became acceptable to the adherents of different religions. For example, the formula perfected in the Yaksha image of Parkham supplied elements for the subsequent statuary of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas, Tīrthaṅkaras, Nāgas, as also Vishṇu, Kārttikeya and other deities. The standing pose, the two hands held in *Abhayamudrā* and akimbo, the upper scarf

and the lower drapery, the ornaments of the ears, arms and hands, the corpulent bust and the robust body, these were employed in the carving out an assertive human form deemed as the adequate symbol of divine expression. In the surcharged religious atmosphere marked by rapid and revolutionary changes, the genius of Mathurā sculptors proved equally resourceful. On the one hand they stuck to the Yaksha and Nāga iconography and on the other introduced evolutionary changes as required by fresh formative forces. The truth of the above may be clearly grasped by comparing the respective figures of a Yaksha, a Bodhisattva and a Vishṇu image. It appears as if sculpture preserved its traditional vitality, independence and established norm, although the plastic carvers were called upon to serve the ends of many a faith and changing times.

This adaptability of sculpture in the Mathurā school ushered in the greatest revolution witnessed in the realm of Indian art, viz. the replacement of the symbol worship of the Buddha by his image in human from. This change affected the future development of art-forms not only in India but in many countries of Asia. The complete formula of an anthropomorphic representation of a divine being had been practised by Mathurā sculptors for several centuries before the Christian era, as illustrated by the early Yaksha images, the statue of Balarāma (c. 2nd centuary B. C., from Jānsuṭī Village), and in several statues of the Vṛishṇi heroes found in a shrine at Morā and authenticated by the Morā Well-Inscription. The several iconic elements as the standing pose, the attitude of the two hands, ornaments, dress and facial expressions were ready to hand and adapted to an easy formulation of the standing type of the Buddha-Bodhisattva Image. There is no doubt that the other features also that were necessary for the perfection of the Buddha image were present in the religious and art symbolism as it prevailed at Mathurā. The *Ushṇīsha Ūrṇā*, *Abhayamudrā*, *Padmāsana*, were borrowed from an ascetic tradition the meanings of which were quite well understood.

Similarly the attendants holding flywhisk, a *chhatra*, lion-throne, divine figures showering flowers were elements of the Chakravartī iconography. An intelligent fusion of the Yogī and Chakravartī formulae supplied the cast for the new image of the Buddha-Bodhisattva. The Dharma-chakra supported on the heads of four lions was known even in Maurya art as a specific symbol of Buddhism and its adaptation on the pedestal of the new image was quite in keeping with the eloquent formula of the Buddha image. Judged from this point of view and in the light of the available archaeological material of the Buddha images, on the visage of which these several plastic details are clearly engraved, there seems to be hardly any room for doubt that the Buddha image was the outcome of the genuine Indian traditions, and that the Mathurā school of sculpture provided as its first matrix. An image like that of the Buddha cannot spring suddenly into being as a single day's effort. So far as the iconographic elements and the traditions of art are concerned, no single engraver, howsoever great a genius he may be, can sit down and perfect the formula of a religious icon in immediate response to the request of a particular client. An image embodies the devotional urge of a whole community harboured for a number of years. A factual analysis of the religious atmosphere at Mathurā reveals that all the plastic elements of Buddha's iconography had been severally present there and also that they were being applied to the making of Jaina and Brāhmanical images. What happened was that the self-imposed interdiction on the representation of the Buddha in human form was removed by the bold decision of either the royalty or the Church, or both working in unison, and the door to the human image of the Buddha was thrown open by such an overriding decision. Such a contingency is indicated by the great Bodhisattva statue of Bhikshu Bala installed in the year three of Kanishka. This giant image together with its huge post and a still bigger parasol has been found at Sārnāth, but it was undoubtedly sculpted in one of the active *ateliers* of Mathurā

and probably under the direct supervision of the pontiff whose name is associated with it. Thus the Buddha image appears to be an original contribution of these great masters, who also otherwise distinguished for their originality in formulating scores of other divine images, influencing the course of other cults, such as the Bhāgavata, Pāśupata, Jaina, Saura, Śākta, etc. It cannot be denied, however, that a slight infiltration of Gandhāra influence in the making of the seated Buddha image, and in the life-scenes, is visible. This was natural since both Mathurā and Gandhāra were acting in collaboration as the centres of a common religious movement under the Sarvāstivādin teachers, as shown by the many inscriptions found at Takshaśilā and Mathurā, and both were also being governed by emperors of the same dynasty. At both these centres religion and art prospered in amity and not in hostility. The fruitful result of this concord enriched both of them.

The underlying unity and identity of the forms of sculpture and architecture as practised in the great Mathurā school become eloquent if we look at the great Stūpas that were built by the Jainas and the Buddhists together with their grand railings and gateways. Not only is the architectural pattern consisting of huge monolithic pillars and horizontal architraves comprising the *toraṇas* facing the cardinal points of a Stūpa, their *Śālabhañjikā* bracket figures, and the circular ends of the beams and the small vertical balusters, carved on two faces, are of a uniform design, but what is still more impressive is the common stock of decorative motifs and the rich *repertoire* of secular subjects illustrating the panels of the crossbars, lintels and railing pillars. The upright posts of the railings round the Stūpas constitute the highest watermark in the aesthetic achievement of the Mathurā school. By the variety of subjects, the elegant workmanship and the perfect execution of the female figures carved on them, the railing uprights of Mathurā have no equal. Such sensuous and aesthetic forms are unknown in any other period. For its

power of eloquent expression, for refined executive ability, for radiating the joyous atmosphere of a religion not yet cramped by an austere code, the Kushāṇa sculpture of Mathurā is a veritable heaven depicting the delight and the contentment of the householder's life. In Indian art itself where great schools flourished in succeeding ages did the classical qualities of the Kushāṇa school seldom repeat themselves. Art and beauty were regarded as of value for enriching life and not to draw upon its objective happiness.

The formative inspiration of Kushāṇa art lasted for about a couple of centuries (c. 50-250 A. D.). Here we witness something fresh and original at every step. Besides the many new images, art motifs corresponding to literary descriptions repeat themselves; e.g. the *Aśoka-dohada* or fertility-rite of the *Aśoka* tree bursting into flowers by the touch of a charming girl's foot, gathering of flowers from the distended boughs of an *Aśoka* in full blossom (*Aśokapushpa-prachāyikā*), female pastime with the long flowery bunches of an overladen *Sāla* tree (*Sālapushpa-bhañjikā*), garden sports with the fructiferous branches of a mango-tree, enjoying in the open air and a sunshine as a bath under cascading water (*nirjhara-snāna*), spending time in recreation with pet birds (*śuka-krīḍā*), intimate love-scenes between couples engaged in mutual make-up or dressing of hair, or in drinking revelry.

The railing pillars present a gallery of such happy themes on the obverse side, whereas the reverse was reserved for subjects of a more serious character and edifying nature, like the figures of Buddha and Bodhisattva, worship of the Stūpa and other religious symbols, and panels depicting Jātaka scenes from the previous lives of the Buddha.

The railing (*Vedikā*) was originally, as its name indicates, an enclosure round Stūpas or religious trees (*Chaitya-vṛiksha*), or a platform for the worship of the Yakshas or Nāgas, Śiva or Nārāyaṇa. It consisted of

upright pillars (*stambha*) fixed on a stable basement (*ālambana-piṇḍikā*) and joined by several cross-bars (*sūchī*) between each pair of pillars and the whole bounded together by a coping-stone (*ushṇīsha*) on the top. Such a series held together served as an admirable demarcation of a religious monument. The transition from the temporary bamboo structure to a semi-permanent timber frame work came in time and was followed by that of stone work. But it still retained the details of joinery essential to wood-work, e.g. the tenons and mortices, the champfering of edges and the pendent pompons of flowers.

The earliest archaeological remains of a stone-railing is the stupendous stone-wall round the central platform sacred to Nārāyaṇa found at Nagarī near Chittor. This was suitably styled as Nārāyaṇa-Vāṭaka. It is a square structure but circular ones of analogous types were erected round the Buddhist Stūpas of Bharhut and Sānchī. The Bharhut railing is elaborately decorated with scenes in bas-reliefs and figure-sculpture in high relief, while the railing at Sānchī, though of similar dimensions, is plain, excepting the Gateways. The railing at Mathurā was of similar construction, but only about half as high. In its decoration and to some extent in the style of carving it was inspired by the Bharhut model. As pointed out above there were two Jaina Stūpas at Mathurā. The earlier one possessed a railing of which the pillars were adorned with different varieties of floral rosettes and full and half medallions showing animal figures both real and fabulous, a number of marine motifs like the fish-tailed elephant ((*jala-hastī*) or fish-tailed bull (*jala-vṛishabha*), etc. This is named as the 'Lotus Railing' (*Padmavaravedikā*) in the *Rāyapaseṇiya Sutta*.

In the next stage the railing received much greater attention and was embellished with figure-sculptures in *alto-relievo*. This is what we find in the case of the railing pillars from the Jaina Stūpa of Kaṅkālī Ṭīlā and from the Buddhist Stūpas of Jamālpur and Bhūteshvar. The

female figures on these uprights possess that voluptuous loveliness for which Mathurā sculpture is so famous.

Thus Mathurā sculpture during its most active period produced new forms of great variety. Firstly, it specialised in religious statuary commissioned by the Buddhists, Jainas and Hindus. Secondly, it created a large number of Yaksha and Nāga images according to the traditional folk-cults. Thirdly, its Stūpa monuments were endowed with dimensional railings and gateways loaded with reliefs and figures of endless description, assimilating a rich stock of ancient symbols which make Mathurā fall in line with the adorned Stūpas of Bharhut and Sānchī. We also find at Mathurā a sprinkling of foreign motifs of specially Indo-Bactrian and Indo-Scythian inspiration, e.g. numerous fabulous animals (*Ihā-mṛiga*) carved on the coping stones, drums of miniature Stūpas and toraṇa-tympanums, etc. Purely Hellinistic subjects found at Mathurā include Heracles and the Nemean Lion, Eagle of Zeus and Rape of Ganymede, Bacchanalian drinking scenes and garland-bearing Erotes. Of Iranian derivation we have the battlement motif, human-headed lions on the pillar capitals, voluted brackets, etc. There were many subjects in which the artists and their patrons were interested. For example, the group of portrait-statues and big stone bowls, etc. The stone bowls have generally been taken to represent the begging bowl of the Buddha, but it appears that they served a cult purpose and were the object of worship by the adherents of the solar cult which seems to have been transplanted in the fertile religious atmosphere of Mathurā in the time of the Indo-Scythians. The legend of the cooking-cauldron of Draupadī given by the Sun-god corresponds to the story of the Holy Grail of the Iranian mythology.

The Bacchanalian scenes have been found in several similar versions carved on the two sides of broad rectangular blocks. Stylistically they bear evidence of progressive Indianisation. The one from Pālikherā

seems to be earlier than the one from Maholī. The former replaces Bacchus by the Indian God Kubera who is seated on Mount Kailāsa. He is drinking from a handled amphora and is attended by two female figures wearing a long sleeved tunic and skirts. One of them holds a cup and the other a bunch of grapes. On the reverse the pot-bellied deity is depicted in a state of helpless intoxication with a loose sheet covering the lower portion of his body. The group from Maholī is quite transformed. Its obverse shows an intoxicated dropping lady in half-kneeling posture, being supported by a male figure and by an attendant girl. On the other side is a dancing scene showing a lady with her husband and attendants. A comparison of the two groups bring out finally the creative independence of the Mathurā school. The foreign setting, the drapery, and even the form of the deity and attendants, all have been changed in the Maholī group, which is more natural, elegant and expressive of the Bacchanalian spirit of abandon and revelry. It is obvious that the cult of Kubera assimilated the traditions that of Bacchus and his worship was accompanied with scenes of merry-making and dancing. Creative assimilation and a new stylistic rendering distinguish the aesthetic endeavour of the Mathurā artists.

To the making of portrait-statues the sculptors of Mathurā devoted their special talents. At the village of Māṭ in Mathurā district the remains of an ancient *Devakula*, which it would be correct to identify as the 'Gallery of Royal Statues', were found with an inscription which says that the building was set up in the time of Huvishka. The inscribed portraits in well-preserved condition are those of Vema Takshama, Kanishka and Shastana or Chashṭana. The idea of setting a gallery of Royal Portraits (*Devakula*) might have been of Iranian inspiration where such installations were well known from ancient times. However, in India it was a unique creation of the Indo-Scythian kings and admirably executed under their patronage. The art of these portraits is realistic and factual as is apparent after comparing them with the figures on the royal coins. The

seated statue of Vema is ponderous and showing a person of tall stature, wearing the northern dress (*Udīchya-veśa*), consisting of an embroidered overcoat, trousers and padded boots. The protrait of Kanishka with an inscription running its lower portion, is even more impressive, being frontly conceived through bold straight lines. It depicts faithfully the dress worn by these foreigners coming from colder regions.

The mace and the sword are fitting emblems of the imperial dignity of one whose sway extended from Mathurā to Khotan and sphere of influence over a wider area. The statue of Chashṭana is conceived as that of a prince of younger years; it seems probable that he was the same as the Kshatrapa ruler of Ujjain, subject to the political influence of the Kushāṇas.

The rich store of Brāhmanical images in Mathurā Museum is specially noteworthy. The formulation of these images was a natural result of the strong Bhāgavata movement of which Mathurā had been the radiating centre from about the first century B.C. Several male busts representing the Vṛishṇī heroes were found in a shrine at Morā village and they go back to the time of Mahākshatrapa Śoḍāsa. This tradition gained increasing momentum with the result that by the first century A.D. religious images of Vishṇu, Śiva, Kārttikeya, had been iconographically settled and produced to the satisfaction of their Bhāgavata followers. The chronological priority in the making of Brāhmanical images to that of the Buddha should be taken as a settled fact on the basis of an image of Balarāma from Jānsuṭī village. It is definitely in the style of the Śuṅga period. Patañjali also writing in the same age informs us of the existence of shrines dedicated to Rāma and Keśava, i.e. Balarāma and Kṛishṇa. Of the same early period is a representation of the Palm Capital (*Tāladhvaja*) which was sacred to Balarāma. It is carved in the round and is furnished with big leaves and fruits and ring on the shaft.

The tradition of making religious images for worship had been well established in Mathurā, so that the transition amongst the Buddhists from symbol worship to the human image of the Buddha came as an easy natural step.

Mathurā artists also created female images of several principal goddesses, e.g. Śrī-Lakshmī, Mahishāsuramardinī, Indrāṇī, Durgā, Bhadrā, Hārītī, Āryāvatī, etc. An image of Śrī-Lakshmī standing in the midst of rising lotus-stems is elegant and her smiling face and natural pose are very charming. Mathurā also produced images of the Sapta-mātṛikā groups.

In the Gupta art of Mathurā there was an expansion of the Brāhmanical pantheon and images of true aesthetic merit were made. A standing image of Vishṇu wearing an elaborate crown and ornaments (E 6) is preserved in the Mathurā Museum. An other figure of Kārttikeya riding on peacock with outspread wings and being anointed by Brahmā and Śiva as the leader of the Divine Army is also a graceful example.

An important group of images depicts the Sun god and his attendants, Piṅgala and Daṇḍa, in fully developed Iranian tradition, i.e. wearing a richly embroidered coat, trousers and thick boots and seated on a chariot drawn by two or four horses. The worsip of Sūrya in this form was introduced by the Kushāṇas, but was assimilated into the Indian religious t aditions.

The images of the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas, of the several forms of Jaina Tīrthaṅkaras and of an elaborate pantheon of Brāhmanical gods and goddesss formed an original contribution of the Mathurā school. The artists imbibed in a spirit of synthesis the traditions and needs of both the folk-cults centreing around the worship of Yakshas and Nāgas, and also responded to the demands of the higher religions like Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism. They took equal interest and delight

in the symbolical and anthropomorphic images and raised monumental Stūpas with elaborate gateways, architraves, tympanums, railing pillars with infinite carved decoration on the medallions, coping stones, etc. They also turned out numerous miniature Stūpas and their parts like basement and drum, of which the surface was carved with Buddhist figures or with fabulous animals. One is struck with the inventive ability of these artists in depicting imaginary and composite animal forms (*Ihā-mṛiga*). Such animals were already popular in the early decorative art of Bharhut and Sānchī, but the Scythian influence operative at Mathurā specially enriched the *repertoire* of decorative animal motifs.

Mathurā culture and its great sculpture stand as the symbol of synthesis. Here the three streams of Indian, Iranian and Hellenistic cultures met and mingled with one another. Similarly their respective art traditions were cast, as it were, in one receptacle and their mutual borrowings and adaptations led to an exceptional aesthetic enrichment. In addition to these, the three important religious movements which flourished in the early centuries of the Christian era found Mathurā to be an ideal place for spreading their activities. The Buddhists, the Jainas, and the Bhāgavatas founded important religious establishments and church organisations in the fertile soil of Mathurā and flourished side by side in harmony and peace. The best fruit of this concord was witnessed in the art creations of the Mathurā school which is so rich and had such imaginative and creative freedom.

DESCRIPTION OF PLATES

Śrī-Lakshmī—Lady of Beauty and Abundance (*Figs. I-II*):

This charming sculpture shows a standing female figure carved in the round. (Ht. 3′5·4″). She stands on a full vase (*Pūrṇaghaṭa*) overflowing with lotus flowers, leaves and buds. Her feet are resting on two full-blown flowers (*padme sthitām*). Her left hand touches her right breast in the pose of pressing milk and the right hand is pointing towards the girdle holding a spray of buds. She is wearing a close fitting collar, triangular necklace, armlets with *garuḍa* design (*garutmadaṅka*), profuse bracelets. a multi-stringed girdle and heavy anklets, and the *sāṛī* is fastened by a sash hanging down in loops.

On the reverse is a tall lotus stem with buds and flowers covering the whole length of the figure and rising from the full vase. A pair of peacocks is perched on the two sides of the rising lotus creeper.

The figure represents the Goddess Śrī-Lakshmī conceived in a new version by the Mathurā artist. He has retained the full vase but making the vertical lotus rhizome in a much more conspicuous form than that found at Bharhut, Sāñchī, Udayagiri or in the earlier art of Mathurā itself, which marks her identity with goddess *Padmā* or *Padminī*. The distinguishing feature of the two elephants sprinkling water over her is omitted but a new feature of *Dugdhadhāriṇī mudrā* or suckling pose is introduced which shows her in her form of a benignant mother, conceived of as source of a stream of milk. Her worship as Śrī-Lakshmī, the combined form of Śrī and Lakshmī, the two consorts of Nārāyaṇa Vishṇu, had come down from the time of the *Yajurveda* and continued through the ages, that is popular even today being known as Mahālakshmī or Nārāyaṇī. At Bharhut her name is found as *Sirimā Devatā*, that is, Śrī-mother goddess. Aesthetically this is one of the loveliest representations



Front View



Back View

Figs. I-II Goddess Śrī-Lakshmī—Lady of Beauty and Abundance



Fig. III Mother and Child



Fig. IV Head of Balarāma

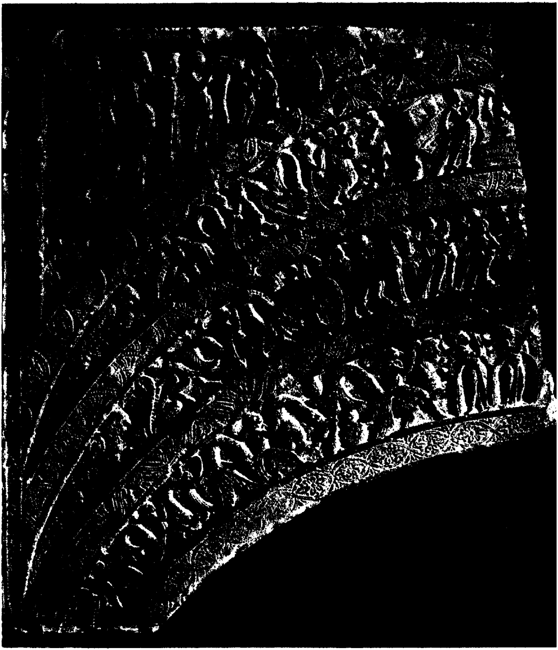


Fig. V Toraṇa Tympanum—Obverse Side



Fig. VI Toraṇa Tympanum—Reverse Side



Fig. VII Madhupāna—Bacchanalian Scene



Fig. VIII Madhupāna—Bacchanalian Scene



Fig. IX Girl with a Lotus



Fig. X Girl with a Parrot



Ob. Rev.

Figs. XI-XII Aśokapushpa-prachāyikā—Aśoka-gathering Woman



Front View



Back View

Figs. XIII-XIV Prasādhikā Attendant



Fig. XV Mahānārāyaṇa Vishṇu



Fig. XVI Bhagavān Buddha—The Enlightened One

of this goddess found in Indian art depicting her as an independent image recalling the Vedic verse :

chandrāṁ prabhāsāṁ yaśasā jvalantīṁ
śriyaṁ loke devajushṭāmudārām|
tāṁ padminīmīṁ śaraṇaṁ prapadye'
lakshmīrme naśyatāṁ tvāṁ vriṇe||

(RV. Apocryphal Śrī Sūkta)

The presence of the pea-fowl was an old feature associated with the ancient mother goddesses as seen on a *Śrī-chakra* ringstone in the Allahabad Museum (*Lalit Kala*, No. 9, pl. VI, fig. 14). The attitude of pressing the breast in the figures of Śrī-Lakshmī is found at Bharhut and on a coin of Azilises and in a well known painting from Dandān Uiliq which seems to have been directly inspired by the Indian prototype. Coomaraswamy points to the familiarity of this motif on mother goddess terracotta figurnies from Mesopotamia ("Śrī-Lakshmī", *Eastern Art* Jan. 1929, p. 181). (Cf. also Ghirshman, *Persia*, pl. 49, fig. 57).

Lucknow Museum : No. B 89 (now in the National Museum, New Delhi).

Mother And Child (Fig. III) :

The mother with child in her lap is standing under an *Aśoka* tree in full blossom. She is holding a rattle in her right hand. The child holding the mother's breast with its left hand eagerly asking for the toy. [Ht. 1′ ½″].

The female figure is wearing her hair in an elaborate manner intertwined with a lotus garland. She is adorned with ear-pendants, a chaplet round the neck bedecked with an elongated sapphire, a pearl necklace falling between the breasts, wristlets and profuse bangles which are usual on Mathurā female figures of the Kushāṇa period.

A female figure standing under a blossoming tree was an ancient motif which formed part of female sports. We have an elaborate descrip-

charming face distinguished by large lotus eyes, a sandal mark in the centre of the eye-brows and full lower lip. The conspicuous turban on the head is a noteworthy feature showing a foliated lotus pattern in a central medallion with a radiate border; being decorated on the sides small *makarikā*-designs.

This type of turban resembles that of a *mahāśreshṭhī* or merchant prince of ancient Mathurā. The aristocratic dignity of the face is conceived in full plastic form. Such figures of Balarāma or Nāgarāja were popular in Mathurā art of the Kushāṇa and Gupta periods. Mathura Museum : No. 406.

Toraṇa-Mukhapaṭṭa—Toraṇa Tympanum (Figs. V-VI) :

This is almost half fragment of a toraṇa tympanum found at Kaṅkālī ṭīlā at Mathurā which formed part of the entrance gateway to the Jaina Stūpa on that site. It is carved on both faces as shown in the two illustrations here. It was divided into three lunate arches with a triangular or gable end in the upper corner. The details of the figures are as follows :

Upper triangle—Figure of a three-terraced Stūpa in the centre, girdled by three women, a *harmikā* on the top and parasols with hanging garland ; in front of the Stūpa as depicted in the scene but most probably placed on the four sides of the Stūpa are four pedestals each with an Tablet of Worship (*Āyāga-paṭṭa*) on it, strewn with flowers. These were known as *Pushpagrahaṇī or Pupphādhāna Vedikā*. On one side of the Stūpa is a family of six members, male and female, offering worship to the Stūpa ; one of them holding a basket with a large garland on it, and also hanging down. In the narrow corner is a wheeled wagon. The scene shows the worship of the Stūpa by a newly married son and daughter-in-law in the family offering a garland of a thousand lotuses to worship the Stūpa known as *sahasrapushkarasraj* or *kiñjalkinī mālā* (*Devī Māhātmya* 5.49).

tion of the same under the title *Sālabhañjikā*, with reference to Queen Māyādevī's garden sports in the famous Lumbinī Grove, in the *vasanta* (spring) season. The tree could also be *Aśoka* after which the festival was called *Aśoka-pushpa-prachāyikā* ; and similarly *Āmra* or *Kadamba* after which the names of the festival would be *Āmra-pushpa-prachāyikā*, *Kadamba-pushpa-prachāyikā*. The general title for these sports in ancient India was *Udyāna Krīḍā*. Mathurā art is full of such representations. The tradition was quite popular in the preceding sculpture on the Bharhut and Sāñchī Stūpa railings and gateways. On the railing pillars at Mathurā this motif has been developed to its highest aesthetic form as a thing of real joy and beauty.

The present figure retaining its sylvan atmosphere carries it a step further, by introducing the homely atmosphere of the youthful mother fondling her child in the simplest form with a toy. The mother's face is beaming with inner joy and the child is all eagerness for his pet toy.

The mother and child motif was an ancient one being mentioned in the *Ṛigveda* and repeated many a time both in art and literature. It was universally accepted amongst the Brāhmaṇas, Jainas and Buddhists and became the object of cult worship in different forms, where the Mother was portrayed as *Lakshmī*, *Bhadrā*, *Hārītī*, or *Āryāvatī* ; the meaning and inspiration behind it are everywhere identical. In Kushāṇa art the motif was depicted on a railing pillar in several variant forms but the same was later on included amongst the sixteen *alasa-kanyā* figures on the exterior of Orissan temples under the name of *Mātṛimūrti*. Amongst the thirty-two *devāṅganā* figures on the temples of Saurāshṭra, she was given the appropriate title as *Putravallabhā*.

Mathura Museum : No. F 16.

Head of Balarāma (Fig. IV) :

Head of the life-size figure of Balarāma with a canopy of serpent hoods which have been omitted in the photograph. He has a youthful

puṇḍarīkasahasrasraj (*Matsya Purāṇa* 247.30), *sarasijaparikliptu-divya-mālā* (*Ahirbudhnya Saṁhitā* 21.71).

First lunate arch—In the centre a seated Tīrthaṅkara figure approached by a female attendant holding a parasol. Behind her a *haṁsa Vimāna* followed by two figures riding on the back of fish-tailed lion (*Siṁhamachchha*) and fish-tailed bull (*Gomachchha*) and a fish-tailed *makara* (*Magaramachchha*) whose tongue is being drawn by a small Yaksha figure.

The second lunate arch shows in the centre a human figure being worshipped by a male and two female figures followed by several others in a team in the wagon drawn by two horses and behind their back is a human-headed fish-tailed dragon (*Naramachchha*) with a rider on its back and in the corner a *makara* with a Yaksha as above.

Third lunate arch—The object of worship now lost is approached by a male and a female figure with folded hands, followed by three fabulous figures riding on fish-tailed lion (*Siṁhamachchha*), fish-tailed serpent, or ottar (*Udakāyamachchha*) and fish-tailed elephant (*Hastimachchha*). The extreme corner being occupied by a human figure and a *makara* head. Separating each of the arches are four floral borders.

Reverse (*Fig. VI*) :

On the back side the gable end is occupied by a crowded family of ten figures of men, women and children in folded hands and some carrying garlands. In front of them are auspicious objects like *Pūrṇaghaṭa*, a basket of garlands(*mālya-chaṅgerī*)and three pairs of *śarāva-sampuṭa* (cups with lids, also known as *vardhamāna*). In the extreme end of the triangular space is a wheeled covered wagon. Of the three lunate arches the first is occupied by two bullock-carts with human figures seated in them and several worshippers holding garlands walking in front ; the second is occupied by three flying Devas holding lotuses preceded by a nude ascetic bearing the folded coth on his left arm and the third with two

wagons, one drawn by horses and the other by oxen, preceded by a groom. The centre on the arch is occupied by a male figure in the attitude of Naigameśa attended by a female parasol-bearer. The narrow corners of the three arches are filled with *makara* figures whose tongues are pulled by tiny Yakshas. The *makara* was the vehicle of Varuṇa and the animal *par excellence* of the ocean, the abode of all jewels. It was believed that the mouth of the *makara* contained these jewels which were forcefully extrated by the Yaksha servants of Kubera, the lord of wealth (cf. Bhartṛihari's *Nītiśataka*, *prasahya maṇimuddharenmakaravaktradaṁshṭrāntarāt*).

Lucknow Museum : No. J 555.

Madhupāna—Bacchanalian Scene (Figs. VII-VIII) :

This is a sculpture carved on both sides, mesuring 3′-4″ × 2′-6″ × 1′-2″. Originally it supported a bowl which formed part of the same stone but is now partially damaged. The bowl rested on the top of the trunk of an *aśoka* tree the foliage of which is beautifully carved at both ends.

On the obverse side there is a Bacchanalian scene in which four persons participate ; the central figure obviously the most important shows a graceful female in half-kneeling posture suggesting a degree of inebriation. On her right is standing a male figure, obviously her husaband, who supports her by the arm to prevent her from drooping. A small girlish figure holding a drinking cup stands on the left of the lady whose left arm seeks the support of her attendant's shoulder in a very graceful manner. The lady is wearing on her head a dangling ornament probably known as *prabhrāshṭaka* (*Amarakośa*), pendants made of pearls in both ears, a beautiful pearl necklace of multi-strings, a typical girdle, bangles on the wrists and anklets round the feet. The male person on the right has curly hair held by a garland in front and wears ornaments in the ears, neck and hands. In the corresponding space on the right is a standing figure carved in the background. She appears to be a female attendant ; her undeveloped breasts and masculine shoulders

mark her out as hermaphrodite (*varshadhara*) generally employed in royal harems. Her cheeks are twitched and the attitude of the index fingre indicates her suprise at the effects of deep potation noticed in her mistress.

On the reverse side of this slab there is a scene consisting of four figures of whom two on the left show a royal lady engaged in dance and her female parasol-bearer, and the two on the right half depict a male person whose attitude suggests a slight degree of intoxication and his attendant at the back with hands supporting his master.

The whole should properly bear the class name 'Bacchanalian' (*Madhupāna*). This sculpture is a valuable addition to the already known specimens of this class from Mathurā, namely, the so-called Stacy's Silenus group found in 1836(now deposited in the Indian Museum) and the well known Pālikherā group (No. C 2 Mathurā Museum). The present sculpture is in a state of excellent preservation and reveals a high degree of aesthetic quality not known before. In its graceful composition, richness of contents and mastery of restrained expression in the figures this Bacchanalian group stands unrivalled. Its unique character also consists in the fact that the male and female figures are carved with their features and dress in pure Indian style unspoilt by the clumsy mixture of Greek and Indian elements as in the other Bacchanalian groups from Mathurā previously found. It may also be noted that a somewhat mutilated specimen similar to this group was found in 1922-23 from Narolī. a village about half-a mile southeast of Maholī [deposited in the Indian Museum, Calcutta, A.S.I., A.R. 1922-32, p. 167, pl. XXXVIII(b).]

The above Bacchanalian group was unearthed at a distance of eight feet from the Bodhisattva statue and at about the same level. Obviously the two sulptures adorned a common shrine. It may be asked with some force as to what could have been the purpose of setting up a Bacchanalian group by the side of a religious Buddhist image. As it

is no longer possible to dispute that the Bacchanalian group formed an integral part of the contents of a religious temple, the only obvious justification of its existence amidst those surroundings appears to be that the sensuous and material side of life consisting of worldly pleasures was symbolised by the Bacchanalian group and the bowl it carried on its top, and the whole thing stood there to present a contrast with the ascetic ideal represented by the Buddha image. Of course, the worshippers of the Buddha in the Mahāyāna religious philosophy sought to reconcile Māra, the genius of temptation, with the Buddha, the embodiment of self-mastery and peace and vanquisher of Māra. This was the attractive synthetic ideal preached by Mahāyāna Buddhism representing a glorious compromise between the life of the world and the life of restraint.

Mathura Museum: No. 2800 (now in the National Museum).

Līlākamala Kanyā—Girl with a Lotus (*Fig. IX*):

This is the figure of a youthful girl holding in both hands the long stalk of a lotus flower. She is standing under an *Aśoka* tree with dense foliage, touching its stem with her left foot. The scene combines two motifs, viz.,*Aśoka-dohada* and *Līlākamala*. In the first a youthful maiden danced under the *Aśoka* tree and gave it a kick with her left foot as a result of which the *Aśoka* tree burst into flowers. This was the poetic convention. Kālidāsa has described it elaborately in the *Mālavikāgnimitra*. The *Aśoka* is said to be longing for the touch of the female left foot (*vāmapādābhilāshī aśokaḥ*). The *Aśoka* tree (*saraca indica*) represents the hero who is desirous of embrace with a heroine. The playful union of the two begins by the *Nāyaka* the hero propitiating the *Nāyikā* the heroine by a bow at her feet. The other motif is that of the girl holding a long lotus in her hand (*haste līlākamalam*) with which she made gestures at the time of her dance proclaiming her *padminī* nature. In Orissan tradition of the *alasakanyās* she is called *Padmagandhā* and in Saurāshṭra Śilpa-Śāstra as *Padminī*.

This *Padminī* maiden in an *Aśoka-dohada* scene is one of the finest female figures depicted at Mathurā. The face is most lovely and the pose of standing very graceful. The dense foliage above, the tree stem at the back, the long lotus stalk in front and the flexed left leg below, make a perfect framing for the youthful sensuous beauty in the centre.

Mathura Museum: No. 2345.

Girl sporting with Parrot (Fig. X):

This is the loveliest young female figure carved on a railing pillar in Mathurā art. She stands in triply tilted (*tribhaṅgī*) pose on the back of a couchant prostrate dwarf. The latter showing a new version of the earlier atlantes, servants of Kubera called *guhyaka* or *kiṅkara*. Above her head is a pair of large *muchakunda* flowers and in her ears are conical pendants made of sprays. In right hand is a mirror with fingers inserted in the loop on its back and the left hand adjusting the pendant of the left ear. On her right shoulder is a parrot with a long tail and fluttering wings. On her waist is a broad beaded girdle of triple strings the ends of which are fastened in a clasp of three circular discs. The arms and the legs are loaded with numerous bangles and the feet bear anklets (*nūpura*). Although nudity is indicated she is wearing a thin *sārī*, the upper and the lower ends of which are shown on the hips and the feet respectively and the two ends are suspended in a loop on the proper right side. The heavy breasts, the slender waist, and the broad hips are depicted with all the grace the artist could command. The smiling expression of the face and the elegance of the whole body are very charming features that easily make this young woman a masterpiece of Mathurā sculpture.

Aśokapushpaprachāyikā krīḍā—Aśoka-gathering Woman or A female figure engaged in the sport of Aśoka flowers (Fig. XI-XII):

It was carved on both sides and used as a *toraṇa* bracket (*toraṇa-śālabhañjikā*). On one side the woman is shown as grasping with her right hand the branch of an *Aśoka* tree; her left hand being placed on the girdle.

On the other side she was holding the branch of the *Aśoka* with her raised left hand and the girdle with the right. These were familiar garden sports (*udyāna krīḍā*) in the representation of which the Mathurā artists took much pleasure. Her hair is shown with a central raised bun adorned with a small circular disc which is typical of many other Mathurā figures of the Kushāṇa period. The pearl necklace of one string (*ekāvalī*) is especially noteworthy as also the profuse bracelets on the arms. The *sārī* with its fine texture and side loops is similar in style to that seen on other Kushāṇa figures.

Victoria Albert Museum, London.

Prasādhikā (Fig. XIII-XIV) :

The female figure standing with a basket of flower garland on her left hand and a water jug in her right shows a toilet female attendant named *Prasādhikā*. She is wearing ornaments and costume typical of early Kushāṇa art at Mathurā, e.g., a rosette in front of her hair, ear-pendants, pearl chaplets, pearl necklaces, armlets, profuse bangles, wristlets, beaded girdle, profuse spiral anklets round the legs and a conspicuous double hollow jingling anklet round the feet. The basket is held on the palm of her left hand raised to the shoulder. There appear to be some flower garlands and most probably some ornaments woven with flowers which were used for decorating the heroine's body with flowery ornaments (*pushpābharaṇa-śṛiṅgāra*).

The pillar is carved on both sides and depicts a combination of two motifs. The other on the back is a pillar with six component parts, viz., (1) a full vase covered with lotus leaves on the body and resting on pedestal with four legs carved in the shape of palm leaves ; (2) eight-sided shaft ; (3) a top also in the shape of a *pūrṇa-ghaṭa ;* (4) capital with winged lions seated back to back ; (5) a projective basement with a lion's head on one side and a ram's head on the other, serving as a support of, (6)

a Bowl beautifully carved with designs of a garland, beaded borders and a conspicuous pattern of lotus, plam or honeysuckle leaf.

Here we find a combination of four motifs, viz. the Full Vase (*Pūrṇa Kumbha* or *Maṅgala Kalaśa*) tastefully decorated with conspicuous lotus reed and set on a beautifully carved base of palm leaf leg (*tālapatra pādukā*). It was an ancient motif used singly or in combination and considered to be auspicious. With this is combined the second motif of the eight-sided pillar with a lion-capital in which the lion figures are winged but human headed, which seems to be an Iranian influence on early Indian art. The third motif on the top of the lion capital is that of a religious bowl which symbolises the Buddha's Begging Bowl (*Bhikshā-pātra*) according to Buddhism. It was in fact a much more ancient motif being known in the *Ṛigveda* as the *Chamasa* of the divine *Ṛibhus* which was originally one but which the divine architect fashioned out into four.

In the decorative art we find a class of divine beings known as *Karoṭa-pāṇi-devāḥ* in the *Divyāvadāna*, who are the same as *Pātrī-dharā devāḥ* of the *Mahāvaṁsa* description of a Mahā-Stūpa in the decorative scheme of which such artistic and divine forms were admitted. In the Mathurā School itself there are several other examples of big stone Bowls which are similarly decorated and apparently served a religious purpose in Buddhist symbolic art.

The figure is made of the typical spotted Mathurā red sand-stone and is now deposited in the Bhārat Kalā Bhavan of the Banaras Hindu University. (Ht. 38 inches).

Mahānārāyaṇa Vishṇu (Fig. XV) :

Image (ht. 3′-7″) of a four-armed Vishṇu. The four arms parted from the elbow, the bifurcating lines being still preserved as well as a part of the back left hand. The elaborate crown is decorated with a crest showing a lion's face emitting pearl festoons (*siṁhāsyodgīrṇa-mauktika-jāla*).

On the front side of the crown we see an ornament consisting of two alligator heads set back to back, which was known as the *sīmanta-makarikā* (*cf. Harshacharita* Cowell's note, p. 226). The *makara* faces hold pearl festoons (*jālakābharaṇa*). Between the *makarikā* and the *sīmanta* line is set a jewel inside a deep-cut foliated scroll. The figure is wearing *nāgendra-kuṇḍalas* in the ear, a *vaijayantī* garland, *yajñīya suvarṇa-sūtra* (a double-chain sacred thread), and *keyūra* armlets. Round the neck is a necklace known as *ekāvalī* which consisted of big round pearls with a central elongated sapphire (*madhyendranīla sthūla-muktā-kalāpa, Meghadūta*). Next to it is a crescent-shaped necklace (*chandrahāra*) having several strings of smaller pearls. The under garment consists of a creased loincloth (*jāṅghikā*) held by a girdle technically known as *netrasūtra* on account of its similarity with the cord round a churningstick (*netra-sūtra-niveśa-śobhinā adharavāsasā, Harshacharita*, II, p. 72). The middle part of the body is modelled as if turned on a lathe (*tanu-vṛitta madhya*). This image of the great god Vishṇu reveals a high quality of art of the Gupta period, the face especially showing deep meditative serenity. The figure was originally provided with a circular halo, the lower portion of which is still visible at the back. Dr. Vogel suggested its identification with a Bodhisattva which must be abandoned. I am indebted to the late Śrī N. G. Majumdar, Superintendent, Indian Museum, who first drew my attention to it as a Vishṇu image while he was on his visit to Mathurā in 1933. Since then the image has been published by me in the Coomaraswamy Volume of *JISOA*. 1937, p. 125 and elsewhere. Judging from its style the figure definitely belongs to the Gupta period and is to be considered a unique specimen of a Brāhmanical image of that age. Unfortunately its find-place is unknown and we cannot be certain about the locality of the monument in which this magnificent sculputre was once enshrined.

Mathura Museum: No. E 6 (now in the National Museum).

Bhagavān Buddha—The Enlightened One (Fig. XVI):

A Statue (ht. 7′ 2″) of standing Buddha clad in a well-carved upper garment (Skt. *Saṅghāṭi*) which covers both shoulders. Round the waist we notice the indication of a gridle which holds up the lower garment visible above the anklets. The right hand which is broken was raised in the attitude of protection (Skt. *Abhayamudrā*). The left hand holds the hem of the upper garment. The hair, in agreement with the canon, is arranged in schematic little curls turned to the right. The protuberance on the top of the skull (Skt. *Ushṇīsha*), a characteristic of the Buddhas, is clearly marked. But there is no trace of the mark on the forehead (Skt. *Ūrṇā*), another sign of *Bodhi*. The nose and elongated ears are slightly injured. The head is adorned with a magnificently carved halo (diameter 3′), circular in shape, consisting of concentric, decorative bands of various designs.

The halo originally possessed a colour scheme which is only partially preserved. The central medallion in the form of a full-blown sixteen petalled lotus had the smaller sepals coloured. The first hand contains a garland held above and below by two addorsed alligator heads, a *makarikā* ornament which was also coloured. The next band consisted of small rosettes painted in the centre. The third band was divided into six parts each separated by a lotus rosette and containing a conventionalised peacock or *Garuḍa* figure holding grape vine in its beak. Only the crest feathers of the *Garuḍa* and the vine creeper were painted. The last band was occupied by a garland interwoven with small rosettes which were painted. This was encircled by a beaded border and a segmented narrow fringe both of which do not show any traces of paint. Although the colour has now become faint it supplies evidence to show that the elaborate halo in the images of the Gupta period was beautified by being tastefully painted.

At the feet of the statue we find two kneeling figurines, partly broken, which represent a couple of human worshippers, presumably the donors of the sculpture. The right one with *ekāṁsikā* drapery appears to have been a monk, probably Yaśadinna himself. On the front of the base a Sanskrit inscription is cut, consisting of two lines in Gupta character of the fifth century :—*Deyadharmo yaṁ śākya bhiksho (r*) Yaśadinnasya. Yad atra puṇyaṁ tad bhavatu mā (2) tā-pittro āchāry-opādhya (dhyā) yānāṁ cha sarva-satvā (ttvā)-muttara jñāna (nā)-vāptye.* "This is the pious gift of the Buddhist monk Yaśadinna. Whatsoever merit (there is) in this (gift), let it be for the attainment of supreme knowledge of (his) parents, teachers and preceptors and of all sentient beings".

Mathura Museum : No. A 5.

Photos, figs, XI—XII, by Courtesy, Victoria Albert Museum, London.

Photos, figs. XIII—XIV, by Courtesy, Bharat Kalā Bhavan, B.H.U.

All other photos, by Courtesy, Archaeological Survey of India.



Svastikapaṭṭa from Mathurā

DESCRIPTION OF FIG. VIII ON PL. VII

(Omitted on pp. 19-21)

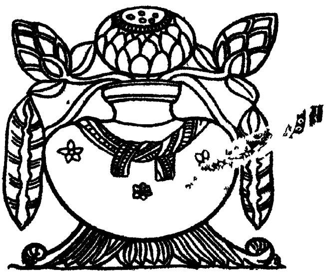
MADHUPĀNA—BACCHANALIAN SCENE

This elegant relief shows a female and a male figure standing in a grove of Aśoka trees. The woman is wearing ear-pendants (*Karṇa-bhūshaṇa*), a short necklace of round pearls (*ekāvali*) and a loose flat torque of beads (*graiveyaka*). On her arms are profuse wristlets and gingling puffed anklets (*nūpura*) round the feet. The hips are adorned by a girdle (*mekhalā*) of four strings of beads clasped in front. Her bust is without drapery but the lower portion is covered with a transparent *sāri* secured by a scarf, knotted and hanging in loops on her left side. The male companion is shown in the delicate pose of pulling the ends of her sash. He is clad in wrinkled *dhoti* . [illegible] wearing armlets (*anantavalaya*).

The scene depicted f[illegible] a part of the Garden-sports (*Udyāna krīḍā*) in which dance, music and drinking were the several items of enjoyment, as often described in classical Sanskrit literature. The female figure is depicted in a dancing pose with her bust tilted to one side and adjusting the torque with her right hand, while her left hand is placed on the shoulder of her male partner who is holding her sash and poised to follow the rhythm of her steps. On proper right side stands a small female figure holding in her right hand a goblet and supporting her mistress with her stretched left arm. As an attendant of tender age she was known as Kubjikā and is also seen in Fig. VII.

The carved panel undoubtedly belongs to the Mathurā School of Sculpture of the best Kushāṇa period as shown by its elegant style and delicate modelling, and the facile representation and natural grouping of the figures.

Provenance : Sarguja (?), Madhya Pradesh. Now in the Indian Museum, Calcutta.



Pūrnaghata from Mathura relief

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